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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND LFREEMAN AND INR JYAPHE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [YM](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: HOUTHI'S OFFER YEMEN (CONDITIONAL) CEASEFIRE, BUT  
MILITARY OPS GO ON

REF: A. SANAA 168  
[1](#)B. RIYADH 129

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. In his second major audio message in less than a week, rebel leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi conditionally accepted the ROYG's five ceasefire conditions, provided that the Yemeni army ceases military operations in Sa'ada. Official media sources reported that the ROYG quickly rejected Houthi's proposal, purportedly because of its conditionality, a claim seemingly backed by ongoing military operations against the Houthi rebels. Other indicators, however, including the cessation of major Saudi military operations against the Houthis, a parliamentary excursion to Sa'ada and rumors of secret negotiations suggest that a near-term Yemen-Houthi ceasefire remains a distinct possibility. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Rebel leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi used a January 30 audio message posted on Houthi media outlet almenbar.net to renew for the fourth time his call for a ceasefire based on 1) the Houthis' acceptance of the ROYG's five conditions and 2) an end to government military operations. Houthi's new message comes less than a week after he offered a similar deal to Saudi Arabia (Ref A). Local media reported that in a January 30 meeting, the Supreme Security Council - chaired by President Saleh - discussed and decided to reject Houthi's offer because of its conditionality and lack of inclusion of the Saudi issues ) withdrawal from Saudi territory and the return of Saudi POWs. (Note: The ROYG, burned multiple times by false Houthi promises during previous rounds of conflict, accuses the Houthis of using ceasefires to rearm and regroup. Officials, including Deputy Prime Minister for Defense and Security Rashad al-Alimi, have said that they will end this round of fighting only with the Houthis' unconditional surrender. End Note.)

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Saudi Arabia (Ref B) and Yemen have both insisted that the rebels accept an unconditional ceasefire and unilaterally implement the required conditions on the ground before either government will officially halt military operations. (Note: Both official Yemeni media and the Houthis reported ongoing military operations ) which, according to the ROYG, killed as many as 20 rebels ) through January 31. NGA analysis also indicates that as of January 28, the Saudis had not reduced their military presence along the border. End Note.) Al-Haq Party Secretary General Hassan Zayd, who regularly mediates with the ROYG on behalf of the Houthis, told PolOff on January 31 that it was difficult for the Houthis to implement the ceasefire conditions ) such as turning in their weapons and abandoning mountain positions ) while there were active military

operations against them. "Who can they hand over their arms to? The soldiers that are shooting at them?" Zayd asked.

14. (C) Despite ongoing military operations, however, signs continue to suggest that behind-the-scenes negotiations are taking place (Ref A). Ruling General People's Congress (GPC) MP from Sa'ada, Abdulsalam al-Zabia, on his way to Sa'ada as part of Parliament's fact-finding commission on the war, told PolOff on February 1 that "something was in the works" regarding mediation, although he was not able to speak freely on his mobile about the talks. (Comment: The fact-finding committee's travel to Sa'ada is a positive indicator of efforts to reach an agreement on a near-term ceasefire. The group, chaired by Deputy Speaker of Parliament Himyar al-Ahmar and including several influential MPs, would be unlikely to travel to Sa'ada if heavy military operations were expected to continue. End Comment.)

15. (SBU) The humanitarian situation in Sa'ada continues to worsen. The UN announced on January 30 that the number of IDPs displaced by the conflict had likely risen to 250,000 ) higher than predicted just one month ago. UNHCR estimated that more than 7,000 IDPs are currently fleeing Sa'ada each week for neighboring Hajja governorate. Presidential Advisor for Sa'ada Affairs Mohammed Azzan told PolOff on January 16 that, because the ROYG agreed to provide and coordinate assistance only to IDPs at official camps, tens of thousands of the displaced had no access to aid. Even in Sana'a, according to Azzan, more than a thousand IDP families were suffering without any assistance.

COMMENT

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16. (C) Hope is not lost for a near-term ceasefire in Sa'ada, despite the ROYG's official rejection of Abdulmalik al-Houthi's newest ceasefire offer. The ROYG, driving towards what it fervently hopes will be the final iteration of the Sa'ada War, has made it clear in the past that it needs certain guarantees from the Houthis that they are truly committed to peace before it will consider any proposal from the rebels. Such a guarantee is unlikely to come across in public media statements, but rather in quiet, detailed discussions between government and Houthi mediators. It seems likely that such talks are now taking place; their success will ultimately depend on the ability of both sides to find common ground on which to end this conflict and begin rebuilding trust after nearly six years of war. END COMMENT.  
SECHE